

Cocoa Plantations by Day, a Volcanic Spike at Sunset — A 5-Day São Tomé & Príncipe Itinerary

A 5-day loop through the twin-island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe, 150 miles off the coast of Gabon and barely visited by outsiders: colonial-era cocoa plantations and the 663-meter volcanic spike of Pico Cão Grande on the main island of São Tomé, then a short hop to Príncipe, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of rainforest and empty beaches with barely a few thousand residents. Portuguese is the lingua franca and the former plantation houses, or roças, are now the country's most atmospheric places to stay.

DURATION

BEST TIME TO GO

The two dry windows that bookend the rains; June–Sept also brings humpback whales off São Tomé's west coast

FROM

for 2 people · lodges, the inter-island flight, tours & transfers (international flights to Lisbon not included)

DAY 1

Arrival in São Tomé City

A gentle first day in the small, pastel-colored capital, reachable only via a connecting flight through Lisbon or Libreville.

Airport Arrival — São Tomé International

~10 min to downtown · visa on arrival for most nationalities

TAP Portugal's twice-weekly flight from Lisbon is the main link to the outside world; the single-runway airport sits a short drive from the capital's seafront.

TAP Portugal · www.flytap.com

Fort São Sebastião & the National Museum

~1.5 hours · entry ~\$5 USD

A 16th-century Portuguese fort on Ana Chaves Bay, now the country's national museum, with exhibits on the islands' plantation-era history, slavery and independence, and good views along the harbor wall at sunset.

Overnight — Omali Lodge

boutique waterfront hotel · from \$160–210 USD / night, for 2 people

A small design hotel on the water just outside the capital, with its own pool and jetty — the closest thing the country has to an international-standard base, and the usual first and last stop for visitors.

Omali Lodge · www.omalilodge.st

DAY 2

The Chocolate Route & Pico Cão Grande

A day inland through the plantation houses that once made São Tomé one of the world's largest cocoa producers, ending at the country's most photographed landmark.

Chocolate Route Plantation Tour — Roça Saudade

~4 hours with guide · from \$60–80 USD per person, tasting included

A guided walk through a working cocoa plantation and its crumbling, colonial-era drying sheds, with a lesson in bean fermentation and a tasting of single-origin São Tomé chocolate — a crop that once made these islands among the world's largest cocoa exporters.

Navetur Equatour · www.navetur-equatour.st

Pico Cão Grande Viewpoint

~1 hour at the roadside viewpoint · free

A sheer, 663-meter volcanic plug rising straight out of the rainforest canopy in the island's south — the single most photographed sight in the country, best seen in the clear light of late afternoon from the roadside pull-off near Ribeira Peixe.

Overnight — Omali Lodge

boutique waterfront hotel · from \$160–210 USD / night, for 2 people

A second night back on the water in the capital before the boat trip and flight onward.

Omali Lodge · www.omalilodge.st

DAY 3

Lagoa Azul & On to Príncipe

A morning in the water at the island's best-known lagoon, then a short hop to the smaller, wilder island of Príncipe.

Lagoa Azul Snorkeling Boat Trip

~3 hours, morning · from \$45–60 USD per person, gear included

A sheltered, startlingly clear lagoon at the island's northern tip, formed where a collapsed lava tube opens to the sea; a short boat ride out from Guadalupe reaches calm, reef-fringed water good for snorkeling over coral and reef fish.

Flight — São Tomé to Príncipe

~30 min · daily STP Airways service

A short domestic hop on a small turboprop over open ocean to Príncipe, the smaller and far less-visited of the two islands, with barely 7,000 residents.

Overnight — Roça Sundry

restored 19th-century plantation house · from \$300–450 USD per person per night, half board

A beautifully restored former cocoa and coffee plantation house at the center of a working estate, now the island's signature place to stay — wraparound verandas, a working cacao press on site, and the plantation's old rail tracks still running through the grounds.

Roça Sundry (HBD Príncipe) · www.hbdprincipe.com

DAY 4

Príncipe: Beaches & Rainforest

A full day on an island where nearly a third of the land is protected rainforest and the beaches are almost always empty.

Praia Banana

~2 hours · free, no facilities

Regularly ranked among the most beautiful beaches in Africa: a short, palm-backed crescent of pale sand facing a calm, reef-protected bay, usually with no one else on it.

Rainforest Walk — Príncipe Biosphere Reserve

~3 hours, guided · included at Roça Sundry

A guided walk through the UNESCO-listed rainforest that covers much of the island's interior, spotting endemic birds found nowhere else on earth, including the Príncipe kingfisher and the dwarf ibis.

Overnight — Roça Sundry

restored 19th-century plantation house · from \$300–450 USD per person per night, half board

A second night on the plantation before the flight back to São Tomé and the journey home.

Roça Sundry (HBD Príncipe) · www.hbdprincipe.com

DAY 5

Departure

A short flight back to the main island, with time to connect onward before the international flight out.

Flight — Príncipe to São Tomé

~30 min · daily STP Airways service

The same short turboprop hop in reverse, timed to connect with the afternoon international departure.

Departure Transfer — São Tomé International

~10 min from downtown

A short transfer to the airport for the connecting flight home via Lisbon.

TAP Portugal · www.flytap.com